CHAPTER 3

Idiosyncratic Critiques of Dodecaphony

Thomas Wilson's *Three Pieces* (1961) and *Soliloquy* (1969)

THE GLASWEGIAN COMPOSER THOMAS WILSON (1927–2001) began experimenting with twelve-tone serialism at around the same time that he made his first foray into guitar composition in 1961.[1] The story of his journey toward writing *Soliloquy* for Julian Bream in 1969 is thus also the story of his experimentation and growing dissatisfaction with twelve-tone technique. In consequence, *Soliloquy* is not itself dodecaphonic: only a small number of phrases make use of aggregate completion (although a more general chromatic saturation is well-nigh ubiquitous in each section) and only one passage seems to make use of serial ordering (although it is still impossible to discern the identity of a single, linear series).[2] The only (semi)orthodox twelve-tone work Wilson wrote for the guitar during this period was his *Three Pieces* (1961). Even here, however, the appellation "twelve-tone" is sometimes strained. As Phillip Thorne noted in a May 1988 issue of *Guitar International Magazine*, "there is a *sort of* serialism element in these early pieces reflecting an early influence, which in the end was never to convince him."[3] This chapter looks to add flesh to the bones of this tantalizing comment. What does this "*sort of* serialism" consist of, technically speaking?

In the opening *Allegro molto* of Wilson's *Three Pieces*, the composer often treats the row as if it were an inert — that is to say, un-transposable, un-invertible, and wholly linear — object, incapable of development, particularly in the harmonic dimension. The same pitch-class sets are repeated again and again. In consequence, the second piece abandons dodecaphony entirely in order to pursue a more protean harmonic field. The third piece attempts to reconcile freer post-tonal writing with the opening piece's underlying twelve-tone series, but its expressive apex is ultimately marked by a harmony "impossible" to generate from the underlying row (at least on the basis

1 Margaret Wilson and David Griffith, *Thomas Wilson – Introit: Towards the Light* (Glasgow: Queensgate, 2011), 64.

2 I will ultimately argue, however, that even here a twelve-tone row is operational, albeit at a background, precompositional level, as opposed to on the surface of the music.

3 Cited in Wilson, *Thomas Wilson*, 300 (italics added).

Oliver Chandler, *A Twelve-Tone Repertory for Guitar: Julian Bream and the British Serialists, 1956–1983*. GFA Refereed Monograph Series, vol. 4. © 2023 Guitar Foundation of America

of Wilson's idiosyncratic understanding of twelve-tone technique). Crucially, this harmony represents the most overtly guitaristic moment in the work: it embeds an "open-strings" tetrachord [0257] within a more chromatic set, and is articulated by means of a rasgueado—the only instance of a specifically guitaristic technique in the work. Unlike ApIvor's Variations, Op. 29, which put the guitar and modernism into a symbiotic relationship, Wilson instead finally "gives in" here to the guitar's "tonal" construction as a means of breaking out of what he perceived to be an exhausted twelve-tone idiom.[4] As striking as this experimental piece is, then, it seemed to represent an aesthetic dead-end, at least as far as Wilson was concerned.

Despite the tentative and ephemeral nature of Wilson's engagement with twelve-tone-serial guitar writing, however, his reception of Schoenberg's theoretical innovation in his own creative work is of historical interest. He was writing in Glasgow, far away from the magnetic pull of London, where many twelve-tone composers were beginning to hone their crafts. Arguably, the critical distance from metropolitan fashions and trends entailed by Wilson's position on the geographical periphery resulted in his twelve-tone technique being so original. Relatively free from models, he had to find a way of taking a powerful but abstract theoretical idea and turning it into music, almost entirely on his own. Of course, this is not to say that Wilson was ignorant of developments in modern music. He contributed to a panel on the "future of classical music" with Richard Rodney Bennett, Harrison Birtwistle, and Peter Maxwell Davies at the Cheltenham Festival on July 7 1962, for example, where the participants debated Wilson's liberal attitude to serialism; and he met many composers, including Aaron Copland, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, and Krzysztof Penderecki through his work at the extramural department at the University of Glasgow, having opportunities (albeit often very brief) to discuss technique with leading members of the avant-garde.[5] Furthermore, he had lectured on the music of the Second Viennese School and on the 12-tone method, albeit that discussion of the latter tended to be more abstract than practical.[6]

It is difficult to know precisely how deep Wilson's knowledge of serialism was; close reading of his surviving compositions is probably our best hope for elucidation in this regard. Worth bearing in mind, however, are Joseph N. Straus's words about dodecaphony in the American context:

> As a general matter, most twelve-tone composers have had relatively little idea of what their colleagues were doing in any kind of detailed, technical way. . . . Even after the war, scores and recordings were relatively scarce and, even when available,

4 I'm thinking of Richard Rodney Bennett's assertion that "the guitar is a romantic instrument—its resonance and sound is very lyrical. It's a tonal instrument because of its tuning and therefore not ideally adapted to serial music." Quoted in Jim Tosone, *Classical Guitarists: Conversations* (North Carolina: McFarlane, 2000), 68. See also Katalin Koltai, "Breaking the Matrix: Transcribing Bartók and Ligeti for the Guitar Using a New Capo System," *Soundboard Scholar*, no. 6 (2020), online, 1.3.

5 Wilson, *Thomas Wilson*, 67; 65.

6 Private communication with Margaret Wilson, 20 April 2021.

> it was difficult to glean from them the outlines of a twelve-tone compositional method. There were published sources in English, including treatises by Krenek, Leibowitz, Rufer, and Perle, but these were incomplete at best.... Personal networks were a better but still not necessarily reliable source of information.[7]

Wilson's conception of the possibilities and purpose of the twelve-tone row was thus considerably different from Smith Brindle's, ApIvor's, and Bennett's (see chapters 1, 2, and 4, respectively), all of whom had had close, personal associations with twelve-tone figureheads. Often, Wilson's conception is simpler; sometimes it is even needlessly restrictive. One wonders whether this was the result of his deliberately caricaturing a method about which he had always held reservations, simple ignorance, or perhaps both. The limitations of his twelve-tone approach, however—probably born of a too-literal understanding of the row as a complete theme, in and of itself—ultimately lead to the production of an arresting, *sui generis* language. His solutions to the compositional problems he encountered are worthy of thought and study, even if those problems—such as being locked into the harmonies of a single row—might have been easily solved through other, more "classical" means. The following chapter provides close readings of each of the *Three Pieces*, as well as of relevant passages from the later *Soliloquy*, which I argue was partly a response to them.

Three Pieces

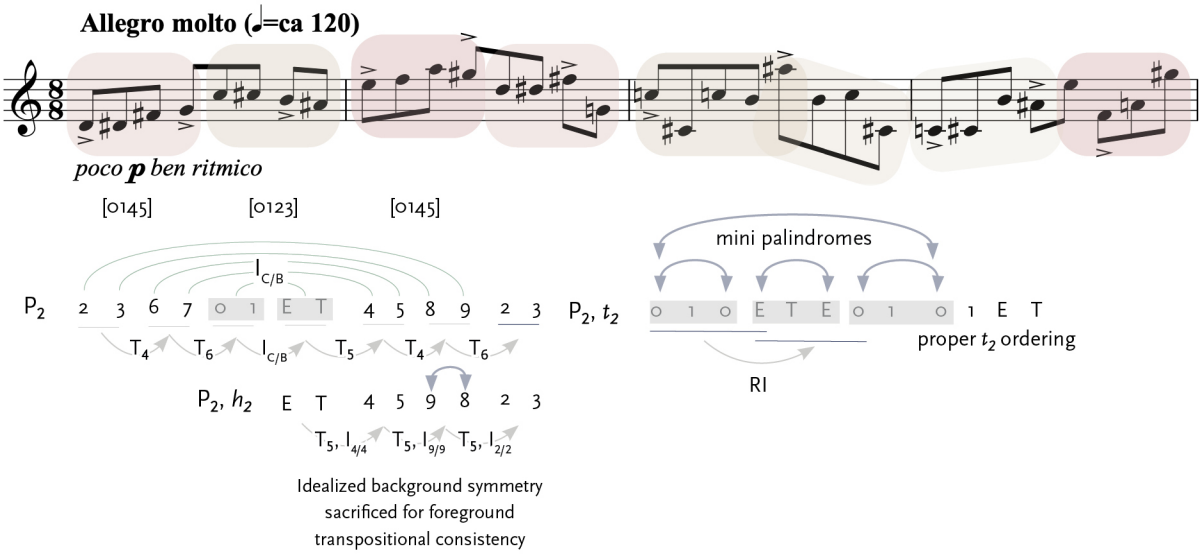
No. 1, *Allegro molto*

As we have already seen, Smith Brindle and ApIvor understood twelve-tone composition to be fundamentally dynamic. Inadequacies or tensions within an opening row, intentionally baked-in, must be transformed or corrected by the subsequent use of *different* row forms. Smith Brindle's rows tend to grow toward an intervallically open harmony at their ends, including a tritone that requires resolution. For that tritone to resolve, the row cannot be repeated exactly; different pitch-class contents are necessary if the appropriate major third is to be produced (resulting in an abstract, subset contraction from [06]to [04] in set-class space), and a different transposition, inversion, retrograde, or retrograde inversion of the opening set is thus required (see chapter 1). For ApIvor, the first row statement of the Variations presents an inchoate form of symmetry. For this to be realized perfectly, hexachordal combinatoriality (or something approximating it) must be utilized as a means of modifying the row's ordering, which is treated as a flexible spectrum as opposed to a fixed *a priori* (see chapter 2).

In a manner reminiscent of his predecessors' approaches, the opening row presentation of the first of Wilson's *Three Pieces* might also be said to generate a "problem."

7 Joseph N. Straus, *Twelve-Tone Music in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 179.

Figure 3.1 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, i, *Allegro molto*, mm. 1–4.



Firstly, the music's serial design—based on four-note, scalic cells, the opening and closing notes of which are usually at least five semitones away from one another and thus registrally distinct—cuts against Wilson's <3, 3, 2> accented division of the 8/8 meter, leading to a tense relationship between structural levels: a general hallmark of musical modernism (see **figure 3.1**).[8] Secondly, and more subtly, the background palindrome, manifested in the horizontal dimension by axial $I^{F}_{F\sharp}$ and order-number symmetry between t_1 and t_3 (i.e., tetrachord 1 and tetrachord 3), is disrupted.[9] Switching the orders of pcs {8} and {9} at <T> and <E> results in their no longer mapping onto {3} and {2} at <1> and <0>. However, this change means that, at a more local level, the first note of each of the row's final three dyads can be heard to relate at T_5; each transposed dyad is then inverted around its first note, I^{X}_{Y}. (Note that my emphasis on the first note is supported, to a certain extent, by Wilson's use of articulation.) Background symmetry is sacrificed for local transpositional consistency. This is important because, as Joseph Straus puts it: "In a large body of atonal music, inversional symmetry comes to function in a manner analogous to key in tonal music: a systematic way of regulating the relationships among the tones,

8 Joseph N. Straus, *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis: Thirty-Three Graphic Music Analyses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 67.

9 As in the foregoing chapter, I opt for I^{X}_{Y} notation here, as opposed to T_nI, because the latter inverts (entirely arbitrarily) around 0, whereas the former pays close attention to the actual notes of the musical surface, which means we are able to discern particular axes of symmetry: i.e., note(s) around which symmetries seem to hinge. Imagine a clock face, for example: if 6 is our center of symmetry, then 6 maps onto itself; 5 maps onto 7; 4 onto 8; and so on. This increased precision will prove to be useful in the following analysis. Music theory owes the idea of contextual inversion to David Lewin's "A Label-Free Development for 12 Pitch-Class Systems," *Journal of Music Theory* 21 (1977): 29–48.

a normative principle of pitch organization. And, as with any normative principle, inversional symmetry may be subject to deviation and disruption."[10] Rather than working to establish a state of symmetry by dynamically "correcting" this discrepancy between background and foreground, however, Wilson simply repeats his row and its constituent "problems" again and again, with only minor modifications. The piece is thus remarkably static, despite its breathless, *moto perpetuo* surface activity.

That said, measure 3 might be interpreted as an attempt to realize a purely symmetrical structure, which responds to the opening P_2 presentation's imperfect one (see figure 3.1). t_2 is articulated in such a way that it can be heard to divide into three trichordal palindromes, symmetrical within and between themselves: <C, C♯, C>, <B, A♯, B>, <C, C♯, C>. Considered in terms of four-note "chunks" instead, <C, C♯, C, B> can be heard to be elided with its own retrograde inversion: <B, A♯, B, C>. Surrogate symmetries in place, the tetrachord is then presented once more in its original order: <C, C♯, B, A♯>. Despite this tetrachordal extension's compensatory function, however, the intense chromaticism of this moment can be felt to liquidate the row, its turning from an ordered melodic succession into a semitonal morass. To borrow from Straus's description of Stravinsky's late music, m. 3 leads "not [to] the gentle reconciliation of opposing tendencies, but rather a furious tension, at all levels, between the forces of integration and disintegration."[11]

As already touched on, harmonic stasis is ultimately produced owing to the ubiquity of a single row form, partitioned into adjacent tetrachords. Only two basic set-classes are heard for the most part: [0145], suggestive of a melodic-minor or hexatonic scale, and the chromatic cluster [0123]. These sets are outgrowths of semitonal dyads combined at different levels of transposition (refer back to figure 3.1). Wilson subsequently attempts to prevent things from becoming monotonous by means of three devices:

1. Rotating tetrachords by one order-position number so as to rhythmically emphasize new, less semitonal ordered-interval successions (particularly ic <+3, +1, −5> and ic <+4, −1, −4> instead of ic <+1, +3, +1> and <+1, −4, −1>);
2. Using different registral spacings to change the *timbral* character of the *same* interval classes (<11s> and <23s> instead of <1s>, for example); and
3. Articulating repeated tetrachords as verticals, voicing them in such a way that they suggest an infinitely recursive series of $\sharp\hat{7}$–$\hat{8}$ discharges (see **figure 3.2**).

The last of these effects is particularly comment worthy. In mm. 29–30, for example, repeated statements of t_1 are voiced in such a way that quasi-GM7 chords with flattened thirteenths are produced. Clearly articulated voice exchanges in the following measures emphasize the movements of {F♯} and {E♭} to {G} and {D} in the outer parts, which mimic $\sharp\hat{7}$–$\hat{8}$ and $\flat\hat{6}$–$\hat{5}$ voice-leading discharges in G minor. The

10 Joseph N. Straus, *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 72.

11 Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 81.

Figure 3.2 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, i, *Allegro molto*, mm. 5–9; 28–30 (opi = ordered pitch interval)

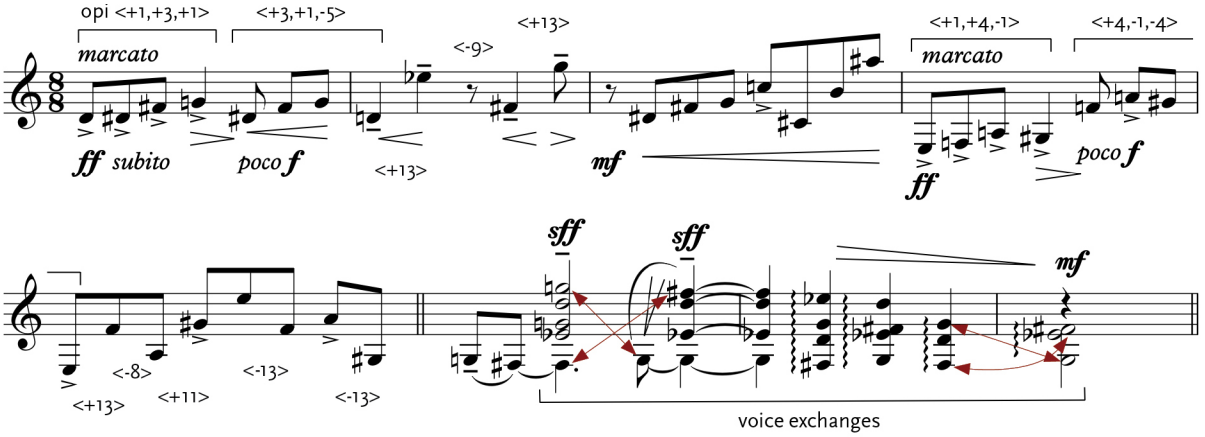
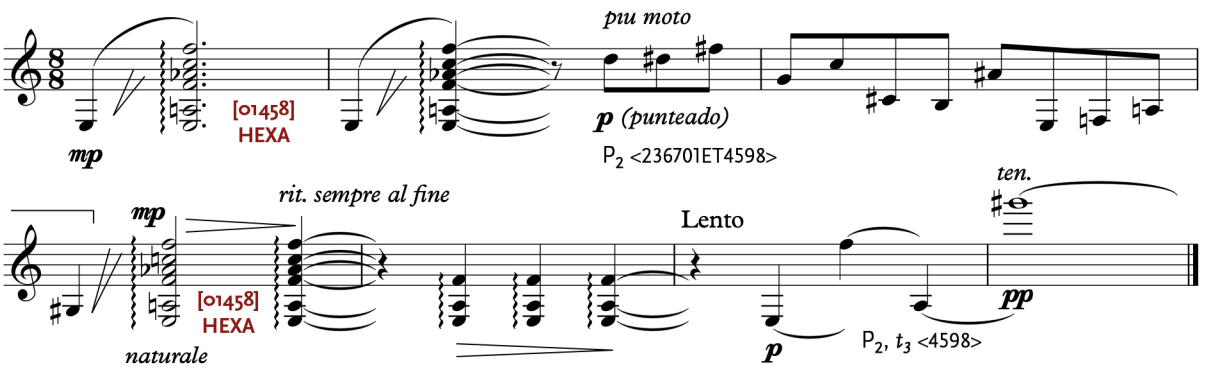


Figure 3.3 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, i, *Allegro molto*, mm. 43–9.

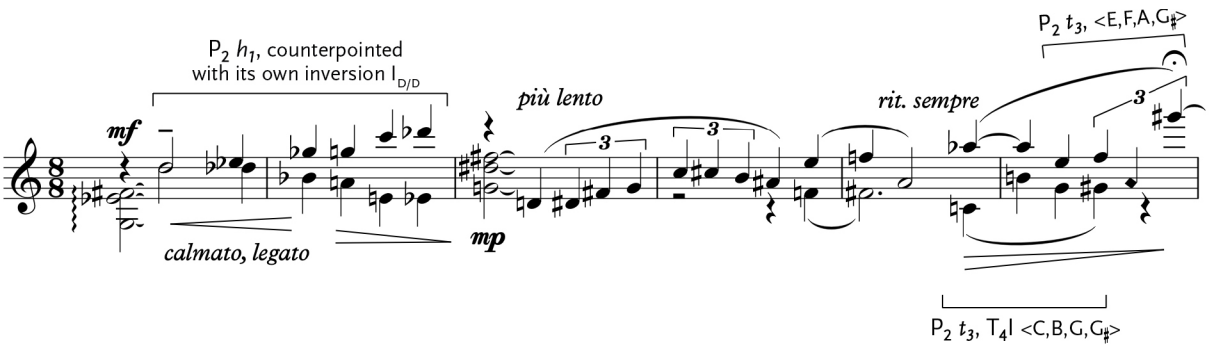


progression consequently thrums with cadential energy. Because the chord *content* does not change, however, each discharge is complicated by the retention of the same dissonant "scale degrees," albeit in a different registral space. In effect, this is closely akin to the phenomenon of tonal-atonal equilibrium outlined in chapter 1. Dissonance and consonance balance one another simultaneously.

While making a virtue of (an admittedly uneasy) harmonic stasis throughout most of the piece, Wilson dwells on an "impossible" harmony at its end: namely <E, A, F, A♭, C, F> [01458] (see **figure 3.3**).[12] This harmony plays an important, culmi-

12 "Impossible" because it cannot be generated by adjacent pitch classes from Wilson's row. Schoenberg and ApIvor got round this problem by using cross partitioning and other techniques to project secondary harmonies; Wilson seems to have been unaware of this possibility. On the concept of secondary harmonies, see Martha Hyde, *Schoenberg's Twelve-tone Harmony: The Suite Opus 29 and the Compositional Sketches* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1982).

Figure 3.4 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, i, *Allegro molto*, mm. 30–35.



nating role in the harmonic argument of the whole. In m. 43, it confirms that the linear [0145] set classes emphasized by the piece's repeated row form belong ultimately to a vertical, hexatonic sound world, as opposed to a more linear, melodic-minor one. In m. 46, its repetition appears to demand both acknowledgment and further development. And yet, because of the music's being forced into the "Procrustean bed" of twelve-tone serialism — or, at least, Wilson's own compositional caricature of it — such development is impossible. The listener has to wait for the more freely atonal argument of Piece II (*Lento, con espressione*) in order for a fully hexatonic environment to be manifested.

Compounding this sense of dodecaphony's insufficiency, here, is the fact that the para-row harmony in question occurs *after* the provisional twelve-tone "solution" of the movement's "problem." Compensating for the disruption of the axial and order-number palindrome between tetrachords 1 and 3 in the movement's first row statement, h_1 (i.e., hexachord 1) and t_3 are subsequently counterpointed with inversions of themselves in mm. 30–31 and 34–35, respectively. Surrogate forms of symmetry are thus produced (see **figure 3.4**). It is telling, however, that the inverted hexachord does not produce an aggregate, and that the inversion of t_3 does not contribute to the completion of a row statement. "Solutions" to twelve-tone "problems" seem only obliquely related to twelve-tone technique here.

Also interesting, in this respect, is that Wilson includes these "solutions" in the B section of the piece's overall ternary form. In Romantic practice, such inner, markedly slower themes are often presented as oases, which can be glimpsed but not inhabited.[13] That Wilson places his piece's "solution" in this subordinate but hermeneutically charged position is potentially suggestive. It may provide momentary attainment, but a fully satisfying denouement is ultimately contingent on forms of resolution that cannot be produced dodecaphonically. The piece must continue.

No. 2, *Lento, con espressione*

If the end of the *Allegro molto* can be heard to signal Wilson's frustration with the harmonic limitations associated with dogged adherence to a single row form — a

13 For a *locus classicus*, see the *romanza* "***" from Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations*.

simple twelve-tone "theme" rather than a generating "motivic complex"—then Piece II fully actualizes the hexatonic, non-dodecaphonic sound world implied by its predecessor's penultimate five-note chords. Free atonal writing is framed as the solution to the inherent problems of serial writing encountered in Piece I.

The inner slow movement aims at development rather than breathless repetition; themes project discernible beginning, middle, and end functions, and Wilson's harmonic vocabulary becomes slowly but surely more variegated, as semitonal dyads are overlaid in new ways, introducing fresh set classes.[14] Indeed, there is something quasi-organic about the construction of this piece: its semitonal DNA helps to maintain a base level of similarity, however varied the musical surface becomes; and the middleground transpositional paths that structure the music's unfolding often reference important foreground pc sets, creating an accord between different structural levels, and between the vertical and the horizontal. Furthermore, tonal references help to create an impression, however fleeting, of demarcation between different harmonic areas—mostly "tonic" and "dominant"—totally absent from Piece I.[15] It is particularly interesting, in this respect, that there are no dynamic markings in this piece, other than the initial *mezzo piano*, whereas there was a surplus of them in the preceding *Allegro molto*. One can only speculate, but I would suggest that Wilson understood the harmonic gradations and development immanent to this movement as readily implying concomitant swells and ebbs of volume and expression. In the world of harmonic limitation and stasis implied by the twelve-tone serialism of the first movement, however, the lack of an active harmonic dimension means that expression has to be injected from without—that is, imposed by means of a composer's detailed markings.

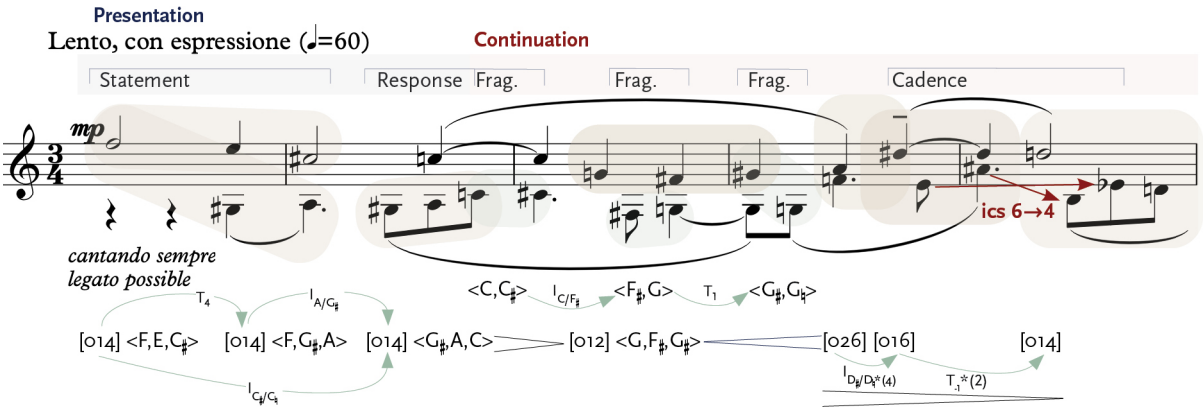
The first theme of the piece can be described as a "sentence."[16] A "basic idea"—a simple motif, composed of an ordered interval succession—is articulated and repeated as part of a "presentation" phrase, before being "fragmented"—reduced to smaller intervallic chunks—as a means of preparing a "cadence." (Cadences are entirely "generic," and so an "individual" theme has to be stripped down to its simplest intervallic constituents if it is to partake successfully in a more "communal" statement of closure.) Fragmentation and cadence are part of an overall "continuation" phrase, which develops the "presentation." Schoenberg first formulated these theoretical categories in relation to tonal music, but they arguably played a foundational, albeit

14 Again, Wilson's melodic technique is similar to that of Stravinsky's late music in this sense. See Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, 82–92.

15 Such superficial references merely help to make the *Lento, con espressione*'s post-tonal coherence more palpable; they do not compose-out a meaningful, quasi-diatonic *Ur*-structure.

16 See Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977 [1967]), 20–24. Schoenberg's ideas about sentences, and musical form more generally, have been developed extensively in the work of William Caplin: see his *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Function for the Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and *Analyzing Classical Form: An Approach for the Classroom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Figure 3.5 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, ii, *Lento, con espressione*, mm. 1–5.



more intuitive, role in the post-tonal syntax of his and many others' compositions.[17] Crucially, these categories help to make attractive sense of Wilson's thematic arguments in the *Lento, con espressione*.

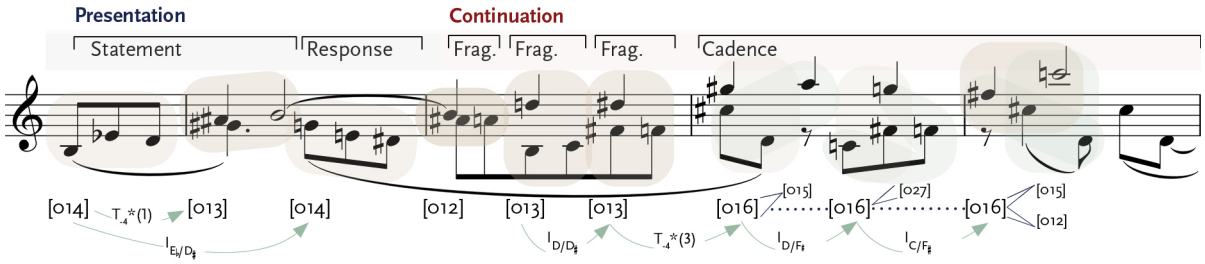
Its "basic idea" is composed of two [014] set classes, related by T_4 (all analysis refers to **figure 3.5** until otherwise indicated). This "statement" is followed by a "response": $I^{C}_{C\sharp}$ takes <F, E, C♯> to <G♯, A, C>; $I^{A}_{C\sharp}$ takes <F, G♯, A> to the same destination. <G♯, A, C> then overlaps with an ensuing <A, C, C♯> set: {A} and {C} stay in place, while {G♯} maps onto {C♯}. Varied repetition allows the "basic idea" to take on the character of a fixed motivic object in the ear of the listener, which facilitates its subsequent development. "Fragmentation" now takes place: the semitonal dyads of the [014] sets encountered thus far are separated from their accompanying ic 3/4s, as a means of projecting a more overtly chromatic set class. {C, C♯} inverts around a C♯/F♯ axis in order to produce the first semitonal subset of the "continuation phrase": {F♯, G}. The latter set is then transposed up a semitone to produce {G, G♯}, and a cumulative [012] trichord overall. Increasingly spacious set classes—[026] and [016]—are then used to indicate the onset of a "cadence." (Interval-class 6, as we have seen already in chapter 1, carries a potentially dominant-like charge.) Movement between the continuation's pc sets is thus characterized by the alternation between "fuzzy" inversion and semitonal transposition (defined by uniformity of transposition in at least one voice, preferably more, and minimum offset voice leading in the other[s]):[18]

$$\underset{[026]}{\langle F, A, D\sharp\rangle} \xrightarrow{I^{D\sharp}_{D\sharp}*(4)} \underset{[016]}{\langle D\sharp, E, A\sharp\rangle}$$

17 See, for example, Ben Earle, "Modernism and Reification in the Music of Frank Bridge," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 141, no. 2 (2016): 335–402, 336–42.

18 See Joseph N. Straus, "Uniformity, Balance, and Smoothness in Atonal Voice Leading," *Music Theory Spectrum* 25, no. 2 (2003): 305–52. These ideas are introduced extensively in chapter 1.

Figure 3.6 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, ii, *Lento, con espressione*, mm. 5–9.



$$\underset{[016]}{\langle D\sharp, E, A\sharp\rangle} \xrightarrow{T_{-1}*(2)} \underset{[014]}{\langle D, B, E\flat, D\rangle}$$

The operation T_1, first ascending, then descending, might be thought to "compose-out" the semitones of the prominent [012], [014], and [016] sets on which this opening sentence is based, providing unity among the growing harmonic variety. Cadential discharge is attained in m. 5, when the <E, A♯> subset of the [016] trichord moves, by means of ic 6–4 voice leading, to <B, E♭>, as part of a [014] superset. An overall trajectory of set-class expansion and contraction has been traced; a directed thematic process is matched by teleological harmonic development.

Resolution is here elided with the beginning of another "sentence" (see **figure 3.6**). Given the increased diversity of set classes—introduced by means of the varied combination of semitonal dyads at different levels of transposition on the musical surface, unfolded at different rates—it can be felt to develop the argument of its predecessor, introducing us to new harmonic sonorities within a similar motivic/transpositional framework. In mm. 1–2, the "basic idea" was composed of two [014] sets, related by T_4, unfolded in note-against-note counterpoint. The beginning of the second sentence imperfectly recreates the same abstract features: the first [014] <B, E♭, D> set, now articulated on its own rather than as part of a two-part texture, is transformed at $T_{-4}{}^{*(1)}$ to produce <G♯, A♯, B> [013]: the first occurrence of this set class in the piece. While the general level of transposition is consistent, {G♯} is a semitone "too high"—it should have gone to {G}—and so a slight set-class contraction is manifested overall. As if in response to Wilson's frustration with the harmonic limitations of Piece i, this "fuzzy" replication of the opening *Grundgestalt* signals a general loosening of harmonic consistency: [013] sets subsequently become increasingly marked on the musical surface. Rather than remaining static, the *Lento, con espressione*'s chordal language evolves. As previously, Sentence 2's "basic idea" is inverted in "response" to its initial "statement":

$$\langle B, E\flat, D\rangle \xrightarrow{I\ {}^{E\flat}_{D\sharp}} \langle G, E, D\sharp\rangle$$

Particularly important here is the establishment of an "even" axis of symmetry: E♭ maps onto itself, producing an inversional index of 0.[19] The rest of the "presentation" is also symmetrical around this axis: i.e.,

$$\{A\sharp\} \xrightarrow{I_{D\sharp}^{E\flat}} \{G\sharp\};\ \{B\} \xrightarrow{I_{D\sharp}^{E\flat}} \{G\}$$

The final note of the semitonal cluster <B, A♯, A> provides a complementary axis tone for the earlier {E♭}. Whereas the piece's opening "presentation" featured multiple, conflicting symmetries, but harmonic uniformity, the second "presentation" manifests the opposite state of affairs: it is symmetrical but harmonically inconsistent.

The "continuation" is made up of semitonal dyads, which unfold at a rate of two to one (quarter notes in the upper voice and eighth notes in the lower): <A♯, B>, <D, D♯>, <G♯, A>, etc. in the top voice; <A♯, A>, <B, C>, <F♯, F>, etc. in the lower (refer back to figure 3.6). Composing-out the most set-class-diverse harmonic chain in the piece so far, a [013] trichord is inverted before being transformed at $T_{-4}{}^{*(3)}$ into [016], which is itself inverted around D/F♯ and then C/F♯ axes. The conflicting symmetries here, which contrast with the {E♭} centricity of the "presentation" phrase, further highlight the breakdown of harmonic consistency. In reference to the latter aspect, note the set-class contractions and expansions that modify the "continuation's" first two [016] trichords in m. 8:

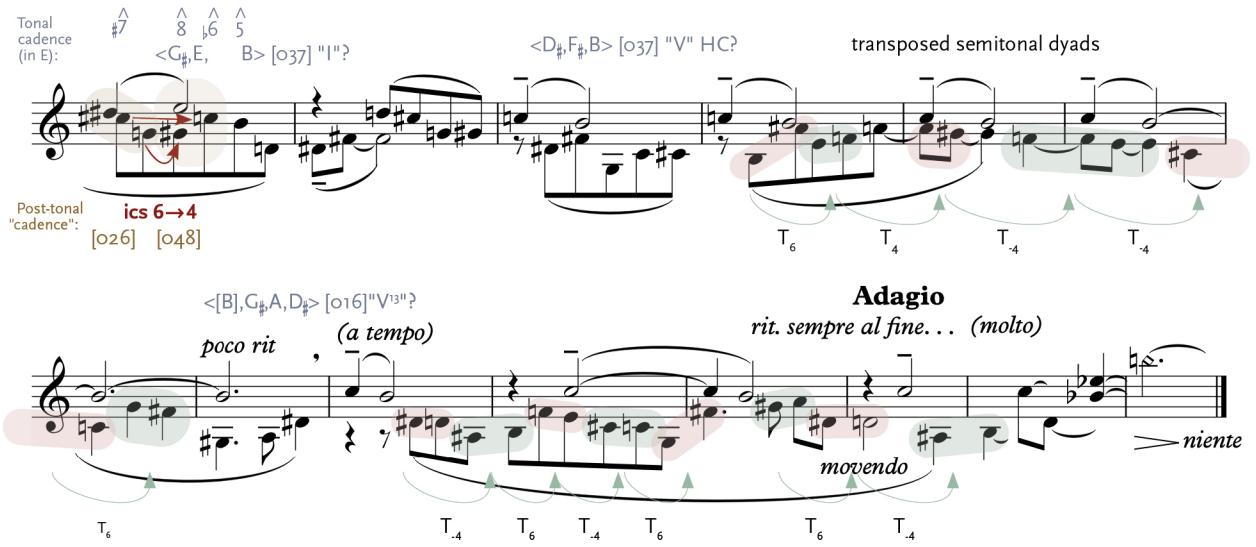
{D, C♯, G♯} [016] > {D, C♯, A} [015]; {G, F♯, C} [016] < {G, F, C} [027].

While only fleeting, these [015] and [027] sets create markedly new "sounds," particularly the latter, which trades in the prevailing hexatonicism of the work for something more quartal-sounding. While the second "sentence" culminates on a [016] trichord, as did the first, [015] and [012] sets are now imbricated with it, by means of a "decorating" {D}. The harmonic argument is cumulative but coherent; similarity is able to produce a steadily increasing level of diversity. For this reason, the piece might be thought to strive toward something resembling a traditional, "organicist" aesthetic.

Supporting this interpretation are the tonal allusions that are peppered throughout the piece. As already noted, the $\sharp\hat{7}/\flat\hat{6}$ voice-leading energetics of m. 29 from the *Allegro molto* created a state of perpetual unrest (in keeping with its generally *perpetuum mobile* texture): the "tonic" chord to which these charged "scale degrees" resolved—{E♭, F♯} to {D, G}—always contained {F♯}: its own leading tone. In the *Lento, con espressione*, by contrast, Wilson uses $HEX_{0,1}$—the harmonic world fleetingly implied but ultimately denied by the restrictive row ordering of Piece I—to create a newly supportive context for these semitonal resolutions. As can be seen in figure 3.5, the opening bars project a strong sense of a modally mixed A major. Similarly, in m. 22, {D♯} rising to {E} and {C} falling to {B} clearly invoke scale-degree qualia of $\sharp\hat{7}$–$\hat{8}$ or

19 For a full theorization of the differences between "odd" and "even" symmetries, see Brian Alegant, "When Even Becomes Odd: A Partitional Approach to Inversion," *Journal of Music Theory* 43, no. 2 (1999): 193–230.

Figure 3.7 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, ii, *Lento, con espressione*, mm. 22–35.

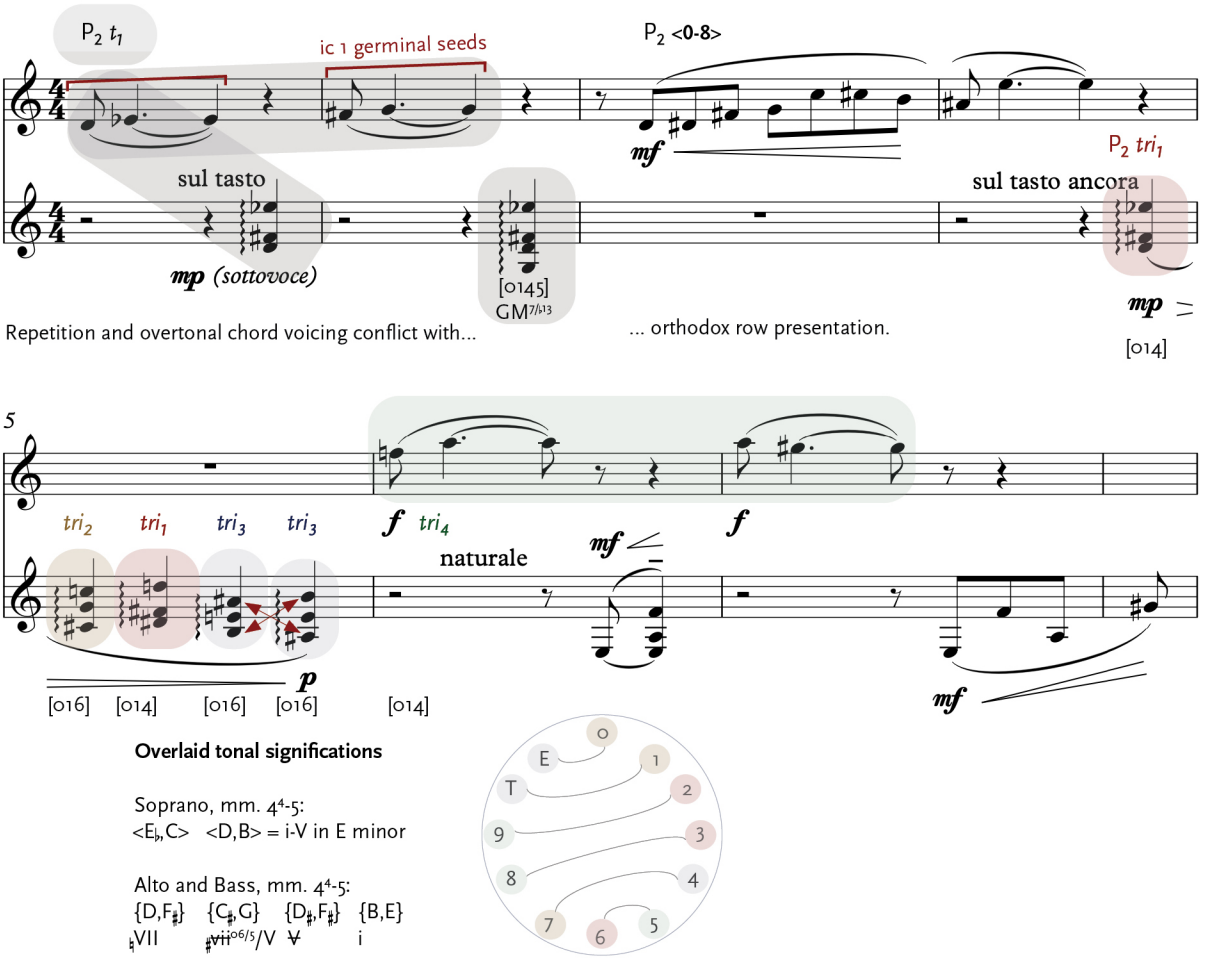


♭6̂–5̂, this time in E major: A major's dominant (see **figure 3.7**). Intensifying this perception is the fact that {G, C♯} (ic 6) moves to {C, G♯} (ic 4), projecting the sense of a cadence, albeit that the "A♭-major triad" projected by the resolution (to ic 4) is revealed to function contextually as part of an augmented triad {E, G♯, C}, with the {C} functioning as a dissonant neighbor tone to the {B}. B-major/minor-like chords at the beginning of mm. 23–24 similarly contribute to a feeling of tonal concentration—<D♯, F♯, D>; <D♯, B, F♯>—but it is at this point that a more motivic, post-tonal kind of coherence comes to the fore. The repeated <C, B> motif in the upper voice from m. 24 to the end of the piece is accompanied by transpositions of a single dyadic motif: namely, ic 1s at T_{-4} and T_6. Together, these reference the [014] and [016] sets on which the opening "sentence" is based. Surface pc sets from the beginning of the piece find themselves reflected in the transpositional pathways traced by the music at its end. Crucially, though, T_4 transformations of a semitonal dyad yield [0145] set classes: a throwback to the abstract intervallic content of t_1 and t_3 from the *Allegro molto*'s opening row. As this sonority becomes prominent for the first time in the movement—it even functions as its concluding set-class <D, B♭, E♭, B> [0145]—the way is prepared for one last attempt at twelve-tone composition. . .

No. 3, *Moderato, poco rubato*

The final piece of this triptych begins by squaring off twelve-tone serial ordering against more overtly "tonal" expressive effects; the latter dominate the former. The remainder of the piece, however, is more "classically" dodecaphonic: rows are juxtaposed in progressively symmetrical ways in an attempt to reveal a systematic way of organizing pitch—something broadly analogous to tonic function in tonal music. The expressive climax of the work, however, is an errant chord that cannot be

Figure 3.8 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, iii, *Moderato, poco rubato*, mm. 1–8.



accounted for by means of twelve-tone logic. Its structural and musical "meaning," I argue, is the locus of *Three Pieces*.

Measures 1–2 articulate the row's opening tetrachord horizontally in the upper voice (all subsequent discussion refers to **figure 3.8** until otherwise indicated). Its component semitonal dyads are separated out from one another as if to emphasize ic 1 as a germinal seed. Meanwhile, the lower voices maintain a <D, F♯, E♭> trichord, with a low {G} being introduced beneath it in the second measure to produce what seems more like a more traditional sonority, suggestive of GM7♭13. An attempt is then made at a full linear row statement in mm. 3–4, but this is abandoned after the first note of t_3. Repetition and tonal reference conflict with an "orthodox" row presentation (at least as Wilson likely imagined it).[20]

20 Repetition occurs with some frequency as a marked expressive effect in Schoenberg's later twelve-tone music: see Keith Salley, "Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Schoenberg's

Wilson appears to venture a new partition scheme in mm. 4–5, moving beyond the tetrachordal texture of the *Allegro molto*. Such a partition should result in a fully symmetrical series of trichords: harmonies 1 and 4, and 2 and 3, should invert onto one another around an F/F♯ axis, thus recapturing the inchoate symmetry of the first piece (see the clock face diagram, bottom left, in figure 3.8). Furthermore, this succession should create a set-class palindrome: [014] [016] | [016] [014]. Note that these trichords were also the most prominent harmonies in the second piece: aspects associated with Pieces I and II — apparently antithetical to one another — are seemingly synthesized. The "contra-twelve-tone repetitions"[21] that have characterized the music so far continue to disrupt aggregate completion, however: after the second trichord, the first is repeated; the third trichord is then subsequently repeated a number of times, with the fourth being stated disjunctly over the top of it. Potential axial symmetry and palindromic set-class succession are obfuscated.

As if in response to the "traditional" voicing of the [0145] set in the bottom stave of m. 2, the series of alternating [014] and [016] trichords in mm. 4–5 is perhaps more fruitfully discussed in terms of overlaid tonal voice leadings rather than row derivation. If the bottom and middle lines are considered without the upper voice, they produce a clear two-part {VII, ♯vii°7/v, V, i} progression in E minor. Considered singly, the upper voice can be parsed as a compound melody that composes-out an <E♭, C> <D, B> descent — the {A♯} functions as a neighbor to the {B} — suggestive of a movement from tonic to dominant in C minor. Taken together, however, the upper and lower voices form ic 1 shadows to one another. A surplus of tonal signification leads to a functionally suggestive but ultimately restless chromaticism. While twelve-tone logic is present, it is ultimately subordinated here to a layering of quasi-diatonic voice-leading effects.

Measures 8–10 seek to marshal the piece's development toward more traditionally dodecaphonic ends. By rotating its order, and beginning on the eleventh note of the row, a new trichordal partition, projected linearly rather than vertically, is introduced. Unlike the previous row presentation, this one now *approximates* the set-class palindrome and axial symmetry of a perfectly realized row (see **figure 3.9**; refer back to figure 3.1 to see a perfect, albeit hypothetical, version of the basic row). The only blemish is the [015] trichord in m. 9, which is a "fuzzy" inversion of the second [016] trichord of m. 8 around the same F/F♯ axis, involving two semitones of offset: {A} is produced instead of {B}.

Perfect row order and symmetry are nearly realized in mm. 11–14. P_2 is balanced by R_7: the first instance of both retrograde and transposed row forms in the triptych (see **figure 3.10**). The first trichord of the former maps onto that of the latter by means of I

Klavierstück, op. 33a," *Music Theory Online* 27, no. 1 (2021): https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.21.27.1/mto.21.27.1.salley.html. Twelve-tone unfolding can also be structured in such a way that tonal references appear as part of directed (as opposed to haphazard) progressions: see Oliver Chandler, "Tonal Dodecaphony and Sentential Form: Extracts from Humphrey Searle's Symphony No. 2, Op. 33," *Music Theory & Analysis* 8, no. 2 (2021): 296–306.

21 Again, repetition is not often actually prohibited in twelve-tone practice; but Wilson appears to push against it *as if* it were a prohibition here.

Figure 3.9 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, iii, *Moderato, poco rubato*, mm. 8–10 (top stave only)

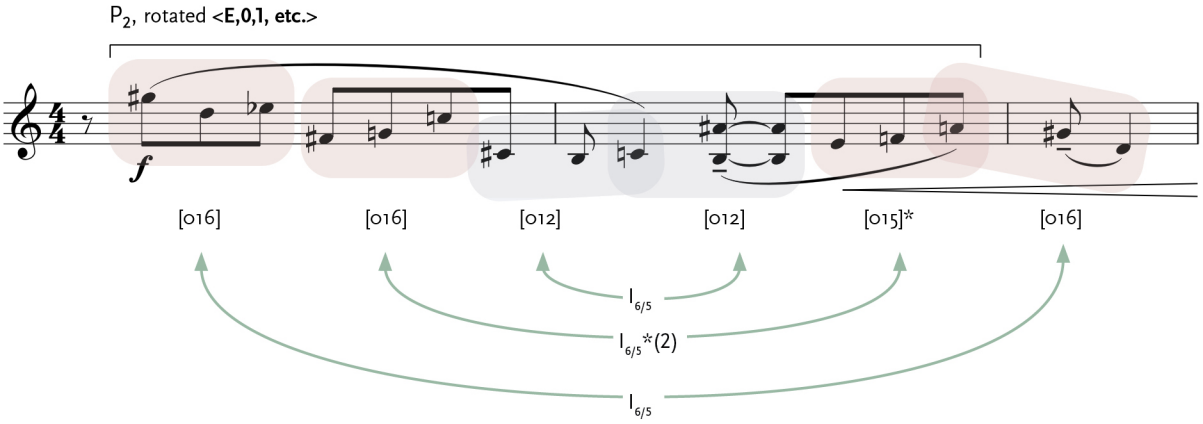
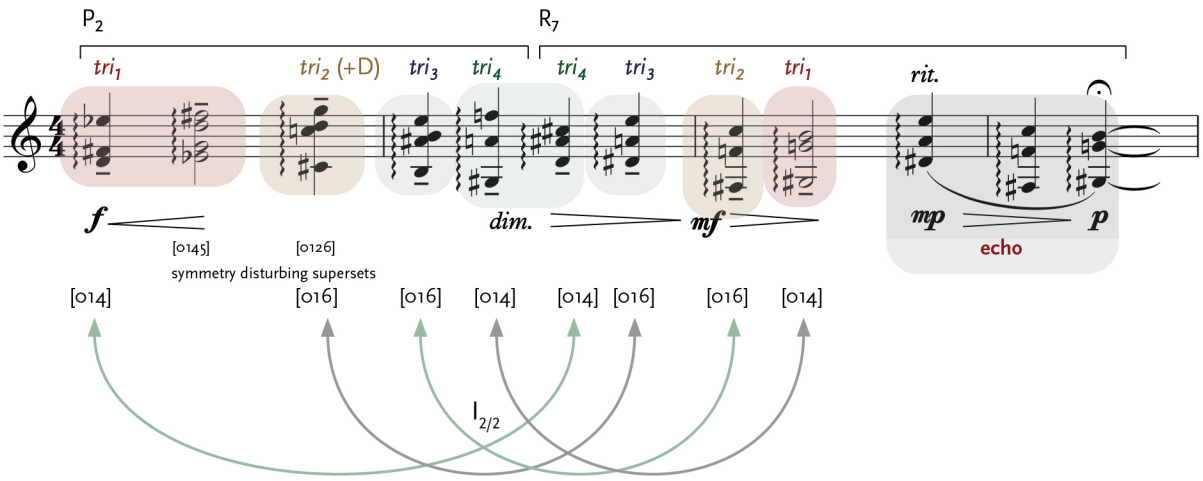


Figure 3.10 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, iii, *Moderato, poco rubato*, mm. 11–14 (bottom stave only)

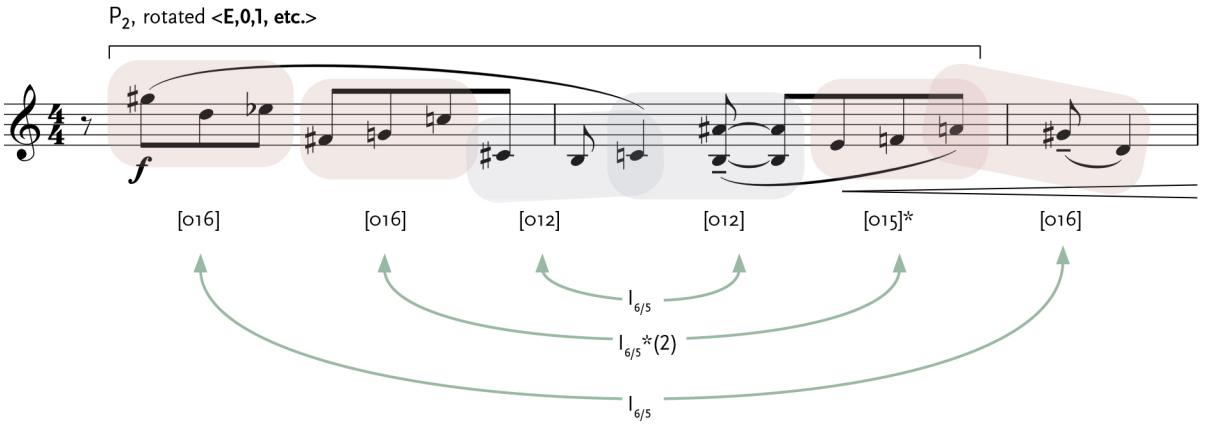


$^{D}_{D}$, and so on. It is only the two tetrachords (featuring no doublings) in m. 11 that lead to the perturbation of this mirror imaging: a conflict between background and surface.

Wilson goes on to use two more different row forms which are also symmetrically related: R_2 and RI_2 (see **figure 3.11**). However, the inversional symmetry ($I^{G\sharp}_{D}$) inherent to their juxtaposition is broken by the interjection of an "alien" vertical in m. 18. Crucially, this chord leads to the omission of RI_2's concluding {D}. This is noteworthy because the first and last notes of R_2 and RI_2 are both {G♯} and {D}, which means that the tritonal axis of symmetry inherent to the two rows could be made relatively explicit on the surface of the music simply by stating one row after another.[22] By obfuscating this axis, however, the symmetry of the rows — already de-emphasized

22 As we'll see, the clearest inversional relationships between rows are manifested when the last note of one row, e.g., RI_0, and the first note of another, e.g., P_0, are elided.

Figure 3.11 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, iii, *Moderato, poco rubato*, mm. 14–18.



by the elision of R_2 with the ending of R_7, <B, G | A♭>, and the repetition of <G, F♯, D♯> from t_3 of R_2, which respectively de-emphasize {A♭} and {D} on the surface of the music—is destroyed. A systematic means of organizing pitch, analogous to a tonal center, is (temporarily) rejected.

Another reason for abandoning twelve-tone serial ordering here, however, is to facilitate new forms of harmony—that is, new "sounds." Because the preceding row pairings are all articulated linearly, the same set classes are still projected, despite reversal and/or transposition. Even the new trichordal partitions featured earlier in the piece produce a limited repository of subsets, derivable from row adjacencies. Wilson addressed the same problem of potential harmonic monotony in the *Allegro molto* by using a single non-row-based hexatonic pentachord to introduce variety. A similar strategy is pursued here, albeit now the stakes are raised: the chord in question more overtly disrupts the piece's defining symmetry too. In m. 18, a new six-note set is introduced: <E, B♭, E♭, A♭, D♭, G>. There are numerous ways of describing this chord's derivation. Most economically, it can be labeled as the first hexachord of R_1, with the {A} being substituted for a {C♯}. It produces a [023679] harmony, alien to the row's [012367] constituent hexachords. Furthermore, it features an aurally prominent [0257] {A♭, B♭, D♭, E♭} subset, the quartal, diatonic "sound" of which is quite distinct.[23] It is a sound specially associated with the guitar's open strings. Indeed, the hand shape for this chord—a first finger barré with second and third fingers creating an ascending diagonal on the top {B} and {E} strings—is very idiomatic, and the rasgueado articulation, unique both to the guitar and to this triptych, further marks it out for our attention.[24] Unlike in the first variation of ApIvor's Opus 29 (see

23 In the earlier *Lento, con espressione*, the inflection of a [016] set to [027] was used as a means of generating harmonic diversity on route to a cadence point.

24 Wilson also marks rasgueado in m. 23 of the *Allegro molto*, but the up-down motion specified in the notation suggests that it is to be produced by a more simple strumming pattern, in which the fingers move as a single unit (as opposed to individually, as one would expect in a real rasgueado).

chapter 2), guitaristic writing and twelve-tone denouement do not coincide here. In fact, they seem actively to negate one another. By making this gesture the piece's expressive climax, Wilson seems to be expressing doubts not only about twelve-tone serial technique, but also its *suitability to the guitar*. The most idiomatic moment is arguably the least twelve-tonal. (The climax of the third fragment of Smith Brindle's *El Polifemo de oro* uses an open-string pc set to similar effect: see chapter 1.)

Symmetry is subsequently restored, however: the remaining notes of RI_2 **<5–e>** are answered by P_2 (see **figure 3.12**). Because the ultimate and initial tones of these rows are both {D}, Wilson elides them. In consequence, the most audible symmetry of the piece is manifested. The question of the meaningful derivation of the quartal subset in m. 18, however, ultimately goes unanswered. From m. 24 until the end, the texture from the beginning of the *Moderato* returns, albeit a full linear statement of P_2 is now achieved. But the marking *rit. sempre al fine* seems to express the music's running out of steam, rather than a sense of fulfillment. It finishes on an isolated <A, G♯> "sigh" figure: the pitch classes and ordering responsible for creating the twelve-tone "wobble" that first energized the *Allegro molto*. Here, however, the potential for musical development seems exhausted. A number of new row forms have been utilized, but they are unable to replicate the developing repository of set classes that gave the *Lento, con espressione* its "organic" harmonic character. This frustration is marked by the rasgueado outburst, with its prominent [0257] subset, which references the function of the hexatonic pentachord that marked a similar moment of impasse in the *Allegro molto*. "Symmetry and its disruption are not enough, on their own, to produce a satisfying movement," Wilson seems to say; but he renders this (idiosyncratic) conclusion in explicitly musical terms, in such a way as to produce a satisfying composition. In this way, Wilson's *Three Pieces* manage to be both subtle polemics against twelve-tone serialism *and* accomplished aesthetic artifacts, in and of themselves.

Non-Dodecaphonic Arguments from Twelve-Tone Seeds: *Soliloquy*, Section 1

> On November 9 1969, *Soliloquy* for guitar [commissioned by the Glasgow Concert Society] was given its first performance by Julian Bream in the Concert Hall at Anderston Cross, Glasgow. The hall, a godforsaken place, was a converted cinema. After the performance Julian told Tom that he had practiced the work for 72 hours, and for the first 43 hours he couldn't figure out what it was all about. Then suddenly it all fell into place.[25]

Soliloquy begins by composing-out a slow, linear cascade of glistening, diatonically suggestive sets—"B♭M7" [014] and "Cm/M7 [014]"—which pool into two rich,

25 Wilson, *Thomas Wilson*, 118; see also 300–1. Its second performance was also given by Bream, at Queen Elizabeth Hall, February 1970.

Figure 3.12 Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*, iii, *Moderato, poco rubato*, mm. 18–30.

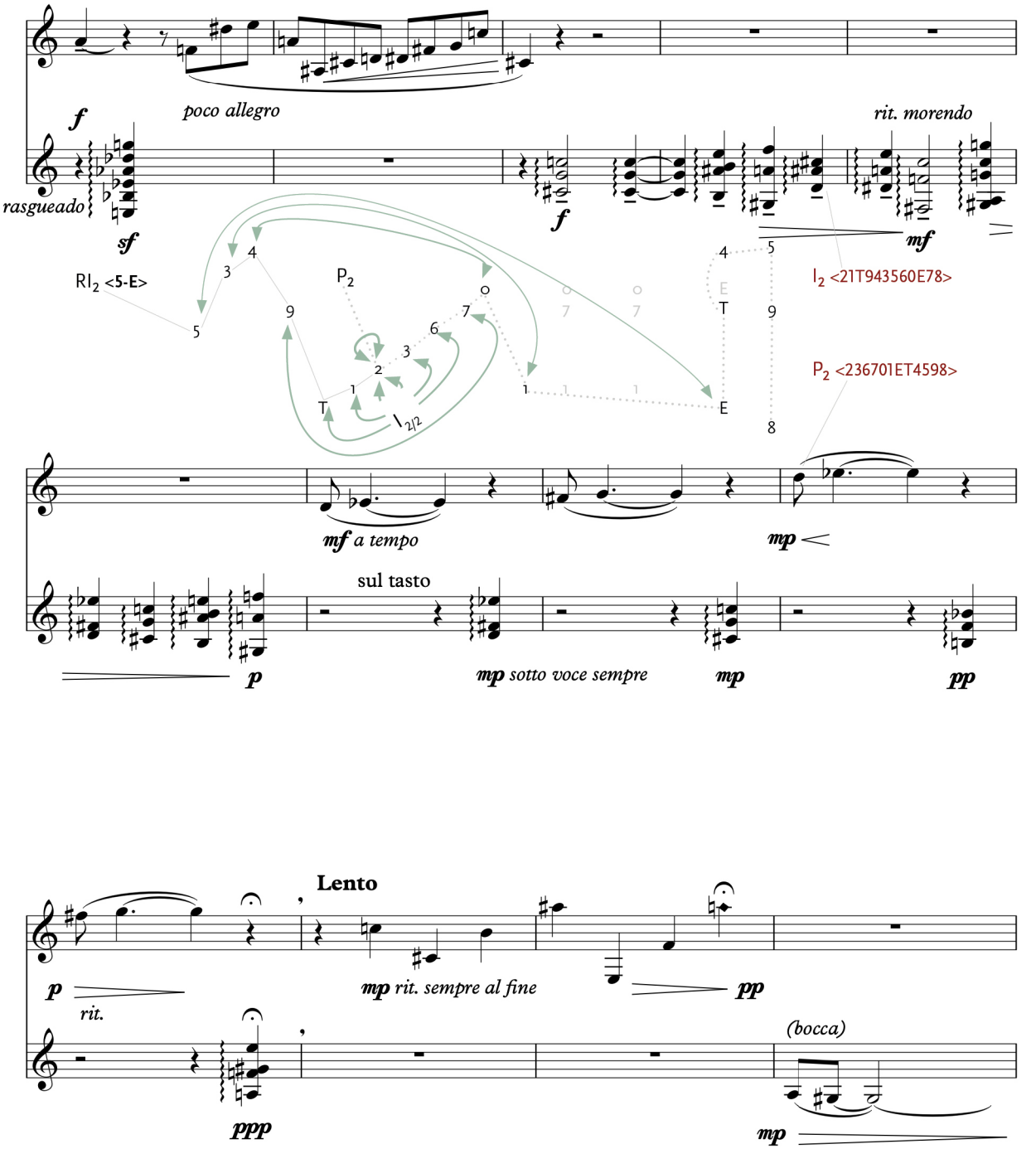
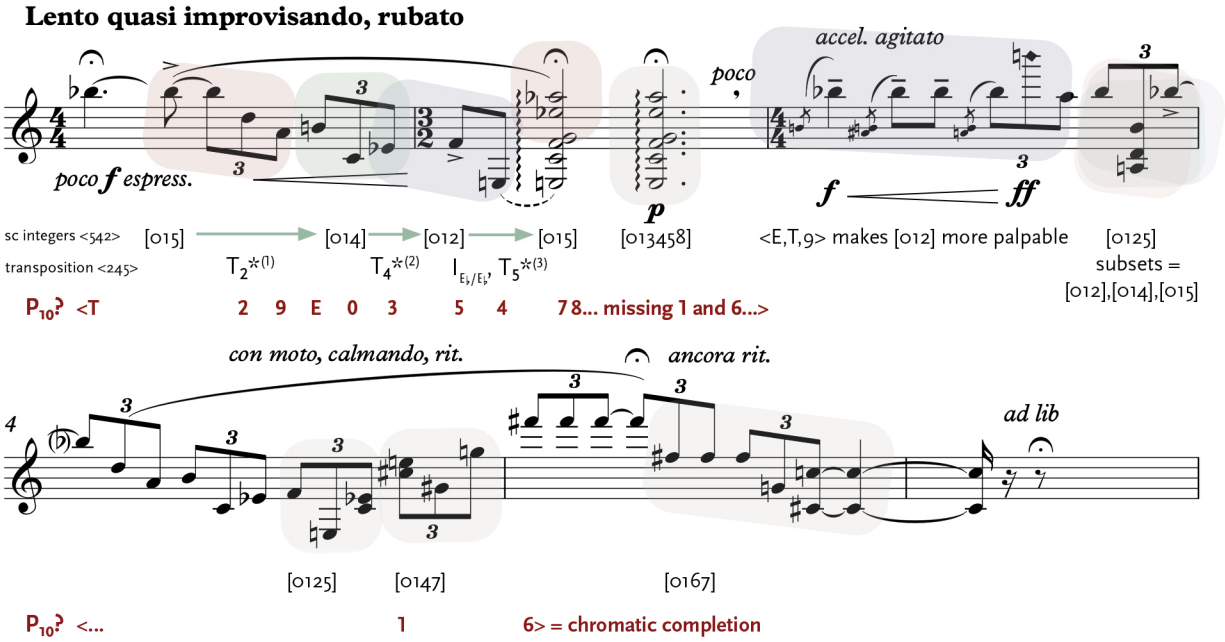


Figure 3.13 Thomas Wilson, *Soliloquy*, mm. 1–6.



spread chords, consisting of an F-aeolian-sounding scale segment <F, G, A♭, C, E♭>, disrupted by a sustained low {E♮}: [013458] overall (see **figure 3.13**). Alternatively, it might be heard to suggest C major on the bottom <E, C, F, G> and F minor toward the top <F, G, E♭, A♭>; but the way in which the {E} is articulated separately to the rest of the pitches suggests the former interpretation, at least to my ear.

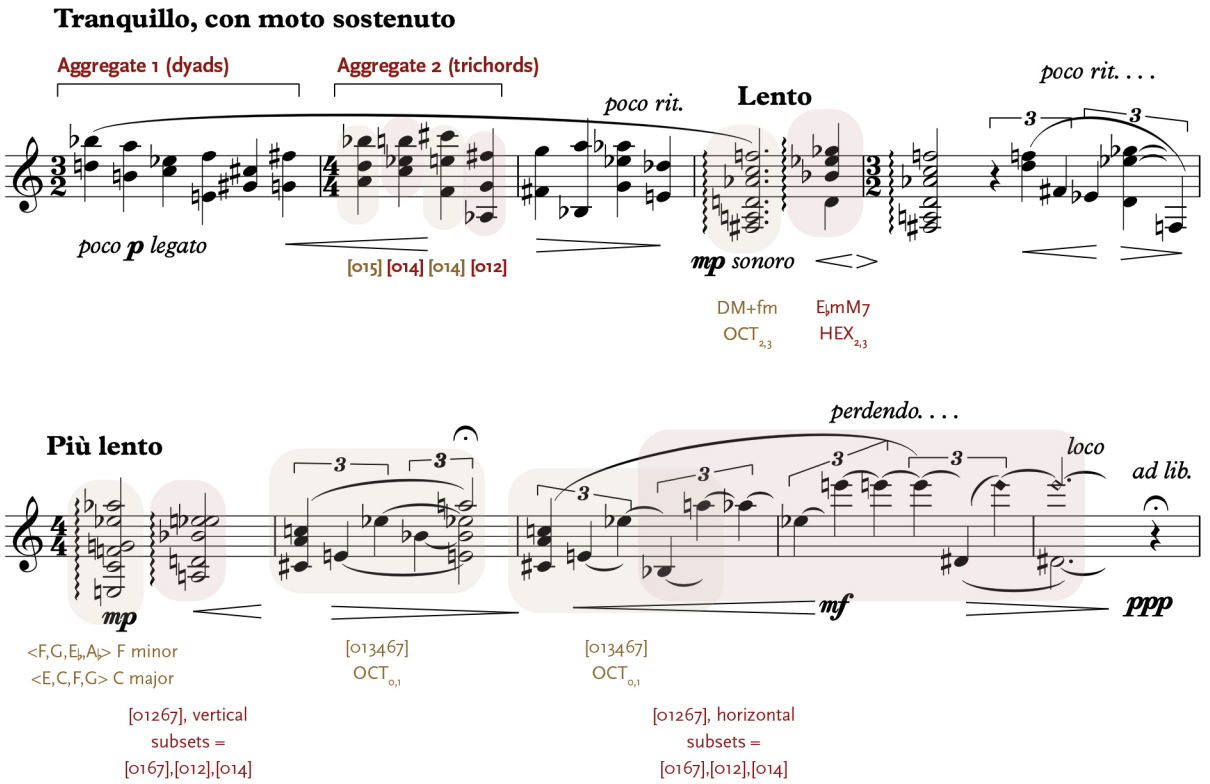
Despite these tonal allusions, the relevant chords do not relate to one another in any functionally obvious way; their underlying connection is post-tonal. Divided into trichordal successions—<B♭, D, A>, <B, C, E♭>, <E♭, F, E>, and <G, E♭, A♭>—an increasingly "fuzzy" series of transpositions is traced: $T_2{}^{*(1)}$, $T_4{}^{*(2)}$, $I^{E♭}_{E♭}$, $T_5{}^{*(3)}$.[26] What makes this reading so compelling, despite its intensive abstraction, is the nuanced connections it highlights between the intervallic properties of the constituent trichords and the network of transformations that relates them. Each of the chords can be understood as being composed of a semitone plus another interval: <5>, <4>, and <2>, respectively. (In this sense, its harmonic repository is similar to that of *Three Pieces*.) The transpositional paths identified above reverse this sequence <2, 4, 5>; the transformational "middleground" thus relates to the musical surface palindromically. The only notes missing from the full chromatic at this point are {C♯} and {F♯}. While these pitch classes do come to serve a prominent role toward the end of the

26 One might also transpose {E♭, E, F} by T_3 in order to produce {F♯, G, A♭}, which would also result in 3 semitones of offset from {A♭, G, E♭} while obviating the need for a phantom inversion. As an interpretation, this is undoubtedly more efficient; but it doesn't reveal a broader network of intervallic interconnection.

miniature section marked out by the first six measures, Wilson is more immediately preoccupied with motivic development, as opposed to aggregate completion. In m. 3, the [012] set subtly articulated on the boundary between mm. 1–2, <E♭, F, E>, is made more obvious and palpable: aggressive, chromatically descending grace notes <B, B♭, A> decorate a static high {B♭}. Two [0125] tetrachords are then intoned as part of an extended repetition of the opening cascade gesture: <A, D, B, B♭> and <F, E, C, E♭>. They contain the three opening scs, [015] [014] [012], as subsets. What was initially experienced as a series of distinct set classes is now, in quasi-organicist fashion, unified in a single sonority. It is at this point that aggregate completion comes into play as a means of closing the argument of this small section. A quasi-triadic [0147] tetrachord, containing the previously absent {C♯}, rockets to the highest pitch touched on the guitar fretboard so far: {F♯}. Repeated, held, and taken down the octave, this note, which at last completes the aggregate, is specially marked for our attention. It is embedded within a concluding [0167]. Crucially, this chord *does not* contain [015], [014], or [012] as subsets. While aggregate completion might be the structural goal of the phrase, it cannot be *heard* as a resolution: it is an abstract form of completion, not a palpable one. The "alien" [0167] set, charged with ic 6 energy, seems to underscore this fact.

So far then, the music has proceeded according to a tightly woven intervallic logic. Chromatic saturation is an important by-product of its motivic working, but the surface is not characterized by crisp aggregate completion nor by serial unfolding. Wilson seems to develop the semitone-based harmonies of *Three Pieces*, but after the manner of the *Lento, con espressione* rather than the outer movements. Emphasis is placed on mercurial harmonic development, impossible according to Wilson's understanding of the twelve-tone row. A little later on in the piece, however, we are given reason to doubt this easy summary. In mm. 16–17, in a section marked *Tranquillo, con moto sostenuto*, Wilson articulates two clear aggregates (see **figure 3.14**). The first is composed of a series of six dyads; the latter, a series of four trichords. Particularly striking are the trichords, because they replicate almost exactly the sets from the beginning of the piece, the only differences being that a distinct <E♭, F, E> set is no longer clearly audible because of the passage's vertical construction, which prevents elision between the notes of two sets, and that C♯ and F♯, missing from the opening cascade gesture, are now present in the upper voice of the final two chords. (Note, though, that the resultant set classes, [014] and [012], are still indigenous to the opening phrase.) An interesting question presents itself: while the opening of *Soliloquy* isn't twelve-tone in any obvious sense, was it generated out of a twelve-tone complex that is only disclosed later in the piece's development? One can only conjecture, of course, but I think this idea is plausible. The piece grows organically toward the revelation of its basic materials, in the same way that a tonal piece might grow toward a clear statement of the tonic triad out of which its structure had been conceptually generated. Again, however, the way Wilson concludes this section seems to stress the abstract quality of this "resolution." After the row has been presented, the section is rounded off with bell-like spread chords, which reference the richly polychordal sonorities of the opening: <F♯, A, D, A♭, C, F>, an octatonic chord composed

Figure 3.14 Thomas Wilson, *Soliloquy*, mm. 16–25.



of registrally distinct D-major and F-minor triads; <D, B♭, E♭, G♭>, an E♭minor/major 7 chord; and the C-major/F-minor subset hexachord, <E, C, F, G, E♭, A♭>. The loosely diatonic implications of these chords create a feeling of (admittedly uneasy) repose, more reminiscent of traditional closure.

While the section's final pc set, <B♭, A, A♭, E♭, E> [01267]—a horizontalization of the earlier <A, D, B♭, E♭, E> set in m. 21 at T_6—is obviously *not* diatonic, it does go some way toward solving the "problem" established in mm. 5–6 (namely that the ic 6-charged [0167] tetrachord did not contain any of the prominent trichords from the music's opening). It houses both the double tritones of [0167] *and* two of the trichordal sets that characterized the opening cascade: namely, [015] and [012]. This kind of cumulative motivic argument, in which opposing chords are embedded within larger, synthesizing supersets as part of a modernistic quasi-cadence, is typical of the practice of one of Wilson's compositional heroes: namely, Béla Bartók.[27]

In his journey from writing *Three Pieces* to *Soliloquy*, then, Wilson had trialed twelve-tone technique in both "strict" and "free" forms. While the former piece might

27 See, for example, Joseph N. Straus's analysis of the opening movement of Bartók's String Quartet No. 4 in his *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory* (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 73–78.

be thought to represent a tussle between himself and a modern theoretical idea with which he felt he had to come to terms, the latter represents a state of newfound ease, where twelve-tone elements are absorbed into the context of a freer overall style. Crucially, though, the row lurks prominently in the background of his creative process, if not always on the surface of his music. As Margaret Wilson put it, as Wilson matured compositionally, "He was prepared … to adopt serial methods, but very fluidly, when they served to mold a piece as he wished it to sound. But he had found that the rigorous application of the serial technique was a creative straitjacket."[28] In *Three Pieces*, I have argued that his frustration at such straitjacketing becomes an arresting musical effect in and of itself. In *Soliloquy*, he is reconciled to dodecaphony: it is "another way to express myself, another tool."[29]

Matrix

	I ↓											
P→	0	1	4	5	T	E	9	8	2	3	7	6 ←R
	E	0	3	4	9	T	8	7	1	2	6	5
	8	9	0	1	6	7	5	4	T	E	3	2
	7	8	E	0	5	6	4	3	9	T	2	1
	2	3	6	7	0	1	E	T	4	5	9	8
	1	2	5	6	E	0	T	9	3	4	8	7
	3	4	7	8	1	2	0	E	5	6	T	9
	4	5	8	9	2	3	1	0	6	7	E	T
	T	E	2	3	8	9	7	6	0	1	5	4
	9	T	1	2	7	8	6	5	E	0	4	3
	5	6	9	T	3	4	2	1	7	8	0	E
	6	7	T	E	4	5	3	2	8	9	1	0
	RI ↑											

Wilson, *Three Pieces*

Acknowledgments

Thomas Wilson, *Three Pieces*: reproduced by permission of Edizioni Curci SRL.
Thomas Wilson, *Soliloquy*: reproduced by permission of Edizioni Curci SRL.

28 Wilson, *Thomas Wilson*, 68.
29 Quoted in Wilson, *Thomas Wilson*.